

Hisho no Tori

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The mountain was a pillar piercing through from the ground to the sky. The peaks rose to the sky almost at a right angle, each looking like the tip of a writing brush, and they are tied together making a huge massif. The summit of the mountain actually pierced through the clouds. Under the clouds the sharpened peaks stood close together, which made the shape of small waves falling toward the base rapidly. The foot was a vast slope. The city spread out in the shape of stairs there. —At the east of the world, it is Gyōten, the capital of Kei.

The mountain itself was a royal palace. On its summit, Enchō, where only The Ruler and high officials lived, spread out. The big distance between Enchō and Gyōten is the same as between the ground and the sky. And both were completely separated by the transparent sea. Even if you looked up from the ground, you couldn't know that the sea was there. You only saw white clinging clouds which rolled as waves in to the summit. But just underneath the clouds Jichō, where the lower class officials lived, spread among the peaks. The rock ledges faded in color, clung to the huge massif, and countless public offices and countless official residences were built and located there in a row.

Kakan-fu lay in the southwest. The buildings surrounded the courtyard squarely, even though their heights were different, they were connected on all sides and they formed the vast public office. The Sekichō-shi's office lay in a corner of them. Hisho was summoned by the Sekichō-shi. It was the newly appointed Sekichō-shi who had summoned Hisho here, from his home, at the end of July, Yosei 7 by the Kei calendar.

A lower official, an usher, took Hisho to the innermost room. The room faced a large balcony, which jutted out in midair. On the other side of the balustrade, which was carved out of stone, was an abysmal cliff. The old willow located on the corner of the balcony, had branches which hung down like disheveled hair, resting over the balustrade. A bird similar to an egret crouched down under the tree. It perched on the balustrade and turned its spindly neck towards the bottom of the valley, and was immobile as if it was examining it.

[Hisho](#) wondered about what it was looking at.

It did not seem to sleep. Was it watching the lower world? Although it was not visible from the place where he himself stood idly, the scenes of the lower world should have spread in front of the bird. The city flagging by the heat and the stagnation. The exhausted fields and mountains which surrounded the city. Probably, it only saw desolation.

He did not understand why he thought that, but he thought the bird was gazing just at the desolation. Was it because the bird seemed to be anxious about something?

Strangely, it made him recollect a woman. Although she hadn't resembled the egret closely, she had always looked at the scene of the valley like that. However, she hadn't shown any signs that she had been anxious about something. As if she didn't have any interest in the lower world at all.

—It is meaningless if I look at the desolate lower world, isn't it?

She had said so, laughed and thrown a pear. She had said briefly "I'm indifferent about the desolation and the lower world. I don't want to see the cruel things, either."

Why did he think she and the bird resembled each other?—While he thought and looked at the bird, he heard someone's restless footsteps. The sound probably surprised the bird and it flew away. When he turned around, a poor-looking man was just coming into the room. Although he had never met the man till this day, this would be [Suiryō](#), the new [Sekichō-shi](#). [Hisho](#) assumed this and knelt down, losing no time in making a bow to the man.

"Sorry for making you wait. — I'm happy you could come."

The man extended both hands in a gesture of greeting. He looked over 50 and had an unnatural big grin on his thin and sick looking, dark face.

"I guess you are [Hisho](#), the Ra-shi(羅氏)? You don't have to do that, please stand up — there."

He showed [Hisho](#) with his hand to a table on the side of the room. While he also sat down on a chair, he pointed to another chair signaling for [Hisho](#) to take a seat. This, [Hisho](#) thought, was unusual. Fundamentally, two chairs put on opposite sides of the table were the seats of the host and a guest. Of course, [Hisho](#) was not a guest.

“You shouldn’t hesitate, have a seat. I would have seen you before, but I was busy with one thing or another these days. Today I have a little time, so I think I would go see you, but I had not have enough time to do so. Then, I sent for you, I’m glad you could come in spite of being so sudden. I’m sorry.”

[Suiryō](#) was polite as if he were flattered. The [Sekichō-shi](#) manages Ra-shi(羅氏). If [Suiryō](#) has business, it’s natural to summon [Hisho](#) to his office and [Hisho](#) doesn’t have the right of refusing. There was no need to apologize about his being summoned not to appreciate about his coming.

“Have a seat.”

[Suiryō](#) looked back at a lower official. The lower official lifted up a vessel of alcohol. [Suiryō](#) called him and made him arrange it on the table. This was also an impossible treatment according to custom.

[Suiryō](#) told [Hisho](#) to have a seat again and pushed out a cup for him to drink, and leaned forward.

“I heard you have been a Ra-shi(羅氏) for a long long time, right? Is it true you have been a Ra-shi(羅氏) since the Ruler Ri(利)’s era?”

[Hisho](#) replied with only a nod. [Suiryō](#) groaned “uh-huh” and gazed at him.

“You look younger than me, but you are very old really. Actually, I became an official and gained a senseki(仙籍) the year before last. I know that a person after gaining a senseki(仙籍) doesn’t get older any more, but I can’t understand that still now. How old are you really?”

“Well — I can’t remember that.” This was completely true. When [Hisho](#) was assigned and given a senseki(仙籍), it was the Ruler Ri(利)’s era, after ten years

or so of the Ruler Ri(利)'s enthronement by his memory. It already exceeded more than 100 years since his becoming an official?

“It's too long for you to memorize. That's great. Therefore, people call you the Ra-shi(羅氏) in Ra-shi(羅氏). I hear you have a lot of anecdotes. When Ruler Yo(予), the previous Ruler, came to the throne, you obtained words from the Ruler personally.”

[Hisho](#) gave a slight smile. Rumors spread and warped in a polite way

Probably, [Suiryō](#) misunderstood [Hisho](#)'s smile, giving nods and clapping his hands with a broad smile.

“You must use your skill again.” He said and he brought his face close to [Hisho](#)'s, lowering his voice.

“—The new monarch will accede to the throne in the near future.”

[Hisho](#) looked back at [Suiryō](#)'s eyes. [Suiryō](#) nodded.

“I hear a Ruler has finally brought down the [fake Ruler](#).”

“... She was the fake? I suspected it.”

[Hisho](#) asked.

At this period, [Kei](#) the country where [Hisho](#) was born and grew up, had no Ruler. The previous Ruler abdicated after her short reign, then her younger sister named Joei(舒栄) acceded immediately, but in the palace, their opinion was that she seemed to be a fake.

Originally, a Saiho(宰輔), the prime minister of a country, chooses a Ruler. All Saiho are Kirin(麒麟), and Kirin(麒麟) makes the person take the throne according to the will of God. To be attached to the throne without Kirin(麒麟)'s selection is never allowed and the Ruler without Kirin(麒麟)'s selection is called a [fake Ruler](#).

If Joei(舒栄) was a true Ruler or not. —Only Saiho(宰輔) knew the truth. But he was not here at the moment. His health was bad since before the Ruler Yo(予)'s death, and he returned to Mt.Hō(蓬山) which could be called the mother country of Kirin(麒麟) after the Ruler passed away. While The Saiho(宰輔) was absent, Joei(舒栄) rose up and requested to get in the palace, but they had no way to check whether she was a true Ruler or not. Officials resisted the request after the long argument.

Actually, [Hisho](#) did not know particularly about those circumstances. Although [Hisho](#) was one of the officials who lived in the palace, his position was not as high as to be involved in affairs of state. To begin with, Ra-shi(羅氏) did not have any power over affairs of state. Though the division Ra-shi(羅氏) belonged to was [Kakan](#), it took charge of the shooting-arrow ceremony which was completely unrelated to an army and a battle. As the shooting-arrow ceremony was held when the state had important guests or celebratory occasions, Ra-shi(羅氏) which received [Sekichō-shi](#)'s instruction made [Tōshaku](#) for it. Therefore it should not go into his ears, such big problems of state, based on his position and job. It was all high-level decision. Quite literally a talk on clouds, so he could only hear the story as rumors leaked.

They say if a legitimate Ruler with Kirin(麒麟)'s selection gets the throne, the Ruler would bring happy and wonderful events in the depths of the palace. But nothing happened like that. So, high-level officials would have judged she was not a true Ruler. Though Joei(舒栄) requested to get herself in the palace, she was refused and locked out. It was said that angry Joei(舒栄) set camp to the north of [Kei](#), and she raised the voice of impeachment that officials appropriated the palace and did not get her who was the Ruler into there.

“But, I heard the rumor that the Saiho(宰輔) was close to the Ruler.”

The Saiho(宰輔) appeared in Joei(舒栄)'s camp. Such rumor flowed out and the officials lapsed into panic for a short time. If Joei(舒栄) was the true new Ruler, responsibility was imposed on the officials who shut her out. If Joei(舒栄) as a

new Ruler came into the palace formally, there were no doubt that they would have had a severe punishment. Some of the officials who lost their confidence escaped the palace, and gathered at Joei(舒栄)'s camp. Suiryō's predecessor also did so and left the palace.

“I also knew about it. It made most of state governors slide into Joei(舒栄)'s faction, but, probably, it was a mistake. Because they say she was a fake Ruler. We believed in the god and stayed here, and now came the time when our difficulties are rewarded.”

Suiryō said with deep emotions, but did he really have such a deep preparedness at the time? There were rumors suggesting that she was a fake Ruler and the legitimate Ruler was fighting against her. Since the officials shut Joei(舒栄) from the palace, it was very problematic if she was the true Ruler. — This must be the real intension of the high officials who had stayed at the palace.

“— But I heard the new Ruler is a female.”

Suiryō curled his lip.

“A female one is it...? Again?”

“Yeah.” Suiryō showed displeasure. It was reasonable. Kei did not get along with a female Ruler. These three generations, they had incompetent female Rulers.

“Well, the legitimate Ruler who was selected by god is the Ruler whether it is a female or not — Soon, the new Ruler will come into the palace with the Saiho(宰輔). Then, the formal enthronement will ensue immediately. Make urgently the preparations of Taisha(大射).”

Taisha(大射) is a very special shooting-arrow ceremony which is held at the national big festival. The shooting-arrow ceremony consists of the throw of ceramic targets which are likened to birds and the hit of the targets. The target called Tōshaku are ceramic birds. When the Ensha(燕射) is performed at a party,

they compete and simply please with the number of successful hits, but, Taisha(大射) is completely different both on the scale and on the purpose. At Taisha(大射), missing the target is very ominous, so the archers must be sure to hit. Of course, the skill of archers is required though, [Tōshaku](#) is also made to be hit easily. [Tōshaku](#) were crafted with great skill, itself being worthy of admiration, flying in beautiful and complicated manners, and making exquisite sounds when it was broken with an arrow. It even needs to play sweet music by its breaking sounds. He had also made [Tōshaku](#) play music in the past. A bird-throwing machine which resembled a hill was made for [Tōshaku](#) to be thrown correctly, and only the famous skilled archers were selected. The archer shot down the bird in order, its breaking sound made a tone, then it became music by linking the tones. For it to sound like ancient music by a big band, he arranged 300 archers in lines. Various [Tōshaku](#) flew in the royal yard. The flying [Tōshaku](#) were hit, which was extended radically like a large flower opening, and sounded like Kei(磬), —a stone percussion instrument, a rich music spinning in the atmosphere. When he corrected pitch, he wasn't able to give them an aroma, so he prepared 6000 bowls of trifoliate oranges to compensate an insufficient scent. — It was a long time ago.

“Do it again. It will be an anecdote and remain. — Huh?”

[Suiryō](#) said and looked up at [Hisho](#)’s face as if measuring his reaction.

“You can hardly wait for the chance to put your skill to the test again, can’t you?”

“I don’t know about that.”

“You need not to be modest to me. — This shooting-arrow ceremony will be very first time for the new Ruler. If we show her an excellent ceremony, Her Majesty will be very glad. If Her Majesty is delighted at it, we [Kakan](#) will preserve our honor. She might give us not only praising words but a certain prize. If that happens, all [Kakan](#) will appreciate it and be proud of you.”

At the moment [Hisho](#) got it and giggled in his mind. If like at Ruler Yo(予)'s ceremony he were given some praise words by the new Ruler directly, all [Kakan](#) who engaged in it would have a bright future. — He knew that this treatment for him expected to it.

“Well, do you have some plan for obtaining the praises, sir?”

As [Hisho](#) asked, [Suiryō](#) suddenly shut his lips. He knitted his brow dubiously and tried to see [Hisho](#)'s face.

“—some plan?”

“I need directions to what kind of [Tōshaku](#) we should make. Actually, you know that Tōkan(冬官) make [Tōshaku](#), of course.”

Normally, [Sekichō-shi](#) plans the next shooting-arrow ceremony. [Sekichō-shi](#) thinks about what kind of ceremony is made and orders Ra-shi(羅氏) to prepare [Tōshaku](#). Ra-shi(羅氏) let artisans who belonged to the Tōkan-fu(冬官府) make them. Especially, Ra-shi(羅氏) uses expert artisans called Ra-jin(羅人) who make [Tōshaku](#).

“I heard you would have done it all by yourself.”

“Never, sir!”

“No way. Because they say my predecessor couldn't distinguish between Taisha(大射) and Ensha(燕射).”

It is true. It was not only his predecessor. ALL [Sekichō-shi](#) except the first one [Hisho](#) served knew nothing about the ceremony. ‘The Ra-shi(羅氏) in Ra-shi(羅氏)’ does everything, so you needn't to do anything.

This is an easy duty although not juicy. — He thought Suiryō was also said so.

There are two types among the officials, one is self-made men, and the other is appointed by orders from above. Suiryō was the latter certainly.

“If Sekichō-shi were too incapable, I would have no choice but to help him. I think such a thing could be seen, though, sir.”

This bare bitterness gave Suiryō an unpleasant expression, but, he regained immediately a smile on his face.

“I was just nominated as Sekichō-shi. Of course, I understand my duty and I am going to learn urgently, but not enough for this Taisha(大射). I would be sorry if there were a failure for forcing things. It’s safer to leave this to you.”

“I would have been delighted to do so, but unfortunately I feel short on ideas because of my very long service. As a matter of fact, I would have had my position changed or asked for leave soon.”

“No, you can’t...”

Suiryō was confused, murmured and shortly leaned out striking his knee.

“How about the Tōshaku which was praised by Ruler Yo(予)? Is it enough to add a hand and make it showier?”

“You can’t be serious.”

Hisho had a wry smile. Suiryō seemed to be pleased with the Tōshaku, but he might lose his official rank which he had just got, if he had the same praise word from the new Ruler as the one from Ruler Yo(予). He was the happy person who never knew the truth.

“Why? Increasing the number of birds or changing the color —.”

Hisho bluntly refused by wagging his head.

“Tōshaku is made by Tōshō(冬匠). The Tōshō(冬匠), who had made that Tōshaku, is no longer with us.”

“You can let someone else make the same style one. The notes or the plans regarding it still remained, didn’t they?”

“I don’t know if we could or not. If we have them, I couldn’t tell if the Tōshō(冬匠) we have now could make the same one, and, we have little time, sir.”

After receiving Tenchoku(天勅) at Mt.Hō(蓬山) and acceding to the throne formally, the Taisha(大射) would be held during one month or so according to past experience.

“It is Ra-shi(羅氏)’s business that you let them make decent Tōshaku.”

Finally, Suiryō made clear his discomfort with Hisho.

“We have to hold a good shooting-arrow ceremony in front of the new Ruler. You must show the splendid Tōshaku that pleases the new Ruler.”

[Hisho](#) left there, after hearing the [Sekichō-shi](#)'s fading footsteps, who got angry and left the room. When [Hisho](#) went out, the confused lower official looked at him and the summer sun went down. [Hisho](#) didn't go to his working place but went to the west along the main street which extended from east to west through [Jichō](#).

The south of [Jichō](#) almost opened. At the very back of the center of [Jichō](#), a huge gate rose high as if it were scooped out from the slope of the mountain. This is the only gate, Romon(路門), to reach [Enchō](#) —the celestial place, which spread on clouds. There weren't a lot of people who were able to set foot on [Enchō](#) through this gate. Even the officials were no exception in that all of them had not the right to get in there. Although the difference between [Jichō](#) and [Gyōten](#) is the same as between the ground and the sky, there is no difference about the both of them being shut from the celestial place.

[Hisho](#) glanced at the gate, walked further to the west on the main street, and went to Tōkan-fu(冬官府). Tōkan-fu(冬官府) was made from the main office and a number of large and small workshops which surrounded the main office. [Hisho](#) came through intricate roads between the workshops. Although it was a familiar road for him, he had come less often recently. The noise and smell which leaked from the surrounding high walls were familiar, too. Checking the sound of a hammer, the smell of red-hot iron, and everything, he came through the gate at the end.

The workshops are a department which belongs to Tōkan-fu(冬官府). A house, which is the center of the department, is fundamentally made from four small buildings surrounding a yard. Various size workshops are adjoining. In most cases, a workshop is much bigger than a house. So they called a sector of Tōkan-fu(冬官府) a workshop. Besides, the house [Hisho](#) visited had not the west building, moreover, the west side of the yard was cut by a cliff, beyond which

two huge peaks held a canyon between themselves.

The faded peaks blocked your way and obstructed both sides of your view. You could look through the evening glow between peaks, the mountains bottoms far down so they were barely visible, and the sun as it went down through the mountains which looked like pale indigo lines. You should see the city of [Gyōten](#) in the lowest direction. But in fact, you weren't able to see it because it was blocked by thick green woods. The slope which continued from the yard was covered with pear trees.

The pear trees which Shōran(蕭蘭) had planted. Saying she did not want to see the lower place, Shōran(蕭蘭) had continued to throw the pear fruits from this yard. Trees, which were lucky, would take root and grew bigger and bore fruits, and then covered the slope of the bottom of the valley. They had pure white flowers in spring. The clouds of the snow-white pear flowers covered the valley. What a brilliant scene it was!

It reminded him of Shōran(蕭蘭) who had looked at it with her narrowing eyes. Her expression had a strange, but strong resemblance to the bird which [Hisho](#) saw at [Sekichō-shi](#)'s balcony. There is no relation between each other, though.

When he was lost in his thought, a surprised voice came from behind him.

“Mr. [Hisho](#) —”

The young man showed up from the north room, and ran up to him, smiling and grinning.

“It's really great to see you, Mr. [Hisho](#)”

“Long time, how've you been?”

The man who nodded yes was the lord of this house. He was a chief of Rajin(羅人) who were special craftsmen who made [Tōshaku](#). Rajin(羅人) held tens of craftsmen in workshops which belonged to Rajin(羅人). The craftsmen's chief was called master and the master of Rajin-fu(羅人府) was the Rajin(羅人). The young man had a gentle manner which was suitable for truly delicate workmanship, his name was Seikō(青江).

“Please — please come in, sir.”

Seikō(青江) was almost taking [Hisho](#) by the hand. In fact, he looked like beginning to shed tears at any moment. As a matter of fact, [Hisho](#) had not visited Rajin-fu(羅人府) for about a year. Once, he had almost lived there. These days, not only he did not visit Rajin-fu(羅人府), but also he did not go out of his residence at all. No Ruler, no Shooting-arrow ceremony. This were convenient circumstances for him, he did not have to go by Ra-shi(羅氏)'s workshops, and he entirely shut himself in his own residence. During this spring, Seikō(青江) sent a bearer who had the message 'please come and see since the clouds of pear flowers started'. But he refused it. He knew Seikō(青江) was anxious about his health and sent the bearer to him on the pretext of the pear trees blooming. He knew his refusal hurt Seikō(青江) deeply, but he never felt up to it.

He set foot in the room after about a year, there was no change from before. The room was crammed with desks and shelves which were filled with various tools and mountains of notes and plans. A year earlier and always, it was like this here. — Since Shōran(蕭蘭) held the position of Rajin(羅人), since [Hisho](#) had come here for the first time as Ra-shi(羅氏), there has been no change.

When [Hisho](#) looked around with deep emotion, Seikō(青江) blushed.

“We litter with things as usual...”

“This is the way it goes. I can’t remember this room ever being tidy.”

Murmuring an excuse, what Seikō(青江) was confusedly gathering up was old notes and plans. [Hisho](#) wondered if the articles that lay scattered about the desk were made by Seikō(青江). All of them looked like old [Tōshaku](#). Seikō(青江) looked at the ground as he was ashamed of himself, probably noticing [Hisho](#)’s look.

“I was wondering... I am remaking old [Tōshaku](#), because I think it probably serves as training for me.”

“uh-huh” murmured [Hisho](#). As [Hisho](#) did not give instructions, Seikō(青江) did not have anything to do.

“You are eager and splendid though, I tell you to give it up for a while.”

Seikō(青江) raised his face up with a smile rapidly.

“So, we are going to make the new [Tōshaku](#) for the Ruler, Sir?”

“We have to make it. Soon, we will have a Taisha(大射).”

[Hisho](#) told Seikō(青江) about the [Sekichō-shi](#)’s instructions, Seikō(青江) looked amazed. While he heard [Hisho](#)’s words, he was definitely more and more depressed.

“We have very little time. Sorry, but I have to hurry you up. Use your discretion in making it.”

“I can’t make such...”

“I don’t care. We only need [Tōshaku](#) which can fly less awkwardly and be divided

less unsightly. It's pointless to try to use your brains. I am satisfied, if we can hold the ceremony without problems."

"But... this is the first Taisha(大射) for the new Ruler."

[Hisho](#) had a half-smile.

"I think the Ruler will be replaced soon."

"Mr. [Hisho](#)," Seikō(青江) said disapprovingly.

"I hear we have a female ruler again."

It's easy for [Hisho](#) to imagine the reign of female rulers. A female ruler has dreams on the throne, soon loses interest in them and ruins herself. The reign of Ruler Yo(予) was six years, the former female ruler was Ruler Hi(比), her reign was only twenty-three years. And her predecessor was Ruler Haku(薄), hers was sixteen. [Kei](#) had three continuous female rulers, and interregnums were much longer than reigns.

"It is pointless to devise much. As long as its appearance makes it suitable, and if it seems to be auspicious, it will be O.K."

Seikō(青江) glanced down sadly and dropped tears at his feet.

"...Please do not say such a thing but show me a brilliant shooting-arrow ceremony again, sir."

"I have no idea. We have little time, we have no choice but to reuse one of the old [Tōshaku](#). Please do use cheap tricks for variety."

Seikō(青江) drooped his head and looked hurt.

“...I will go and get you plans anyhow. Please wait a moment.”

The back of Seikō(青江) who was leaving the room looked lonely. Seikō(青江) was Shōran(蕭蘭)'s pupil. After Shōran(蕭蘭) disappeared, he was pulled up from the craftsman to Rajin(羅人), but [Hisho](#) stopped thinking of [Tōshaku](#) at that time. Although they only use [Tōshaku](#) at a shooting-arrow ceremony, if he isn't endeavoring to plan about it on a day-to-day basis, he can't make use of it for a sudden ceremony.

Nevertheless, after Seikō(青江) became Rajin(羅人), [Hisho](#) never made a single [Tōshaku](#). [Hisho](#) knew Seikō(青江) thought it was his fault. He blamed himself that the reason of [Hisho](#) not to make [Tōshaku](#) was his lack of skills.

[Hisho](#) sat on Seikō(青江)'s seat. On the desk, some trial workmanship and old plans were located in a line. A blue [Tōshaku](#) was on the notes, arranged and accumulated. He thought it was probably used instead of a paperweight, an old thing which was handed down in Rajin-fu(羅人府). The picture of the bird with a long tail was dyed in the center of the china square board filled with fine designs. A picture of a magpie(鵲). He thought, first of all, it was such a simple thing.— He noticed the [Tōshaku](#) was cracked. Looking carefully, a lot of very thin cracks were running to the place which divides the tail of a magpie(鵲). Cracks here and there and they were patched.

“...It's a very good job.”

Probably, Seikō(青江) made it. Only Shōran(蕭蘭)'s pupil could, she had brought him up with such tender care. Who could complain to him this splendid skill?

[Hisho](#) picked up the [Tōshaku](#). In its own way, it was thick and heavy. A light [Tōshaku](#) flies well, but it may fail to be hit because of moving so quickly. So, it is better to have a certain weight and a slight hollow in its bottom. In this way, its floating time is longer. — This is the earliest style of [Tōshaku](#).

All Ra-shi(羅氏) have made the best use of inventiveness since then. At first, in order to keep shooting it correctly, it flew as slowly as possible, and the device was made by form and weight so that it might float in the air for a long time. Before long, it came to adhere also to appearance. What was only china board of a circle or a rectangle came to take various forms. They are dyed not only by the elaborate pattern, but inlaid with gold or jewelry. Soon, even how to fly has been devised, and also how to break by examining and processing materials. Nowadays all [Tōshaku](#) are not ceramic. It being called [Tōshaku](#) is probably the vestiges of an ancient time.

However — real birds were hit in very ancient times. Various birds including magpies(鶲) were released, and shot. But the Saiho(宰輔) which serves as a Ruler's prime minister hate the taking of lifes. Then, in spite of having been an auspicious ceremony to affect the future, usually the Saiho(宰輔) did not attend the shooting-arrow ceremony. It is not an auspicious event —someone thought. At what time or country? Who knows. They started to use china boards instead of real birds. And the same number of real birds as the number of [Tōshaku](#) which were shot down became to be released into the palace garden.

Nobody knows why they were magpies(鶲). Probably it is related to the magpie(鶲)'s voice, as it is supposed to be a sign of joy. Possibly the main aim is more releasing birds than shooting down [Tōshaku](#). More shooting them down, more voices which are supposed to be a sign of joy.

They had been made to be shot down and broken to pieces without fail —and then the main aim of the shooting-arrow ceremony changed to shooting down and breaking [Tōshaku](#) after a lot of thought and device from a long line of [Sekichō-shi](#) and Ra-shi(羅氏). [Tōshaku](#) which plays music was [Hisho](#)'s masterpiece.

In retrospect, that was the most prosperous shooting-arrow ceremony for [Hisho](#). [Sekichō-shi](#) of those days was Soken(祖賢), the reign of Ruler Ri(惣利) was entering the end of the period. — Of course, he didn't know it around that time.

When Hisho became a Ra-shi(羅氏) because of his good skills, Soken(祖賢) was already a very old and experienced man in his work as Sekichō-shi. Hisho was given all the knowledge he needed by Soken(祖賢). His warm personality —and some innocence in his mind. Hisho was very happy about their work when they were thinking of the shooting-arrow ceremony. If one device was made, another idea was going to be born. He came to Rajin-fu(羅人府) with Soken(祖賢) everyday and lost track of time when they were working, including Shōran(蕭蘭) who was already Rajin(羅人), and they repeated trial and error again and again. People called Soken(祖賢) the Sekichō-shi in Sekichō-shi, and they made Hisho the Ra-shi(羅氏) in Ra-shi(羅氏) before long. Since the Tōshaku which played music made Ruler Ri(惣) very happy, the Ruler got down from on the clouds and visited Sekichō-shi-fu and rewarded Hisho and others by himself. There was no honor beyond this for officials who lived in Jichō. It was the good old days.

—But, Ruler Ri(惣) changed. It was considered whether Hisho let the next Tōshaku sound what kind of music, this time perfume would be attached to magpies(鵲) and when they would be broken a rich smell would flow —while considering those things, the reign of Ruler Ri(惣) began to darken. Probably the next Taisha(大射) was held three years afterward. Although celebrations to mark the 60th anniversary of Ruler Ri(惣)'s ascension to the throne were held, he already tended to change into a tyrant at the time.

Nobody knew what made Ruler Ri(惣) do so. Someone said that his son was assassinated and it made deep cracks between the Ruler and his close aides. It did not become clear who killed his son. Then, Ruler Ri(惣) was possibly caught by suspicion and fear. It was said that he was frequently hard on officials. Soon this came down from on the clouds and had a bad influence around Hisho. The Ruler was testing officials at every turn. He thrust difficult subjects which seemed to be impossible, and, occasionally asked officials for proof of too much loyalty. His behavior did not make an exception for Sekichō-shi. At the 60th anniversary he ordered them to show a better shooting-arrow ceremony. His manner implied that he would not tolerate them not doing better than the last one.

Remembering of those days, [Hisho](#) breathed with difficulty even these days. Their devices became the duty, not the pleasure. Shishi(司士) who is [Sekichō-shi](#)'s superior was too eager for success, and put in much interference with a lot of instructions. It was absolutely necessary that the ceremony was even more magnificent than last time. This sense of duty and Shishi(司士)'s interference without considering the amount of work, made preparing it very difficult.

But, the ceremony had succeeded, he thought. Ruler Ri(利) was very pleased, saying it was more wonderful than last time. Both Soken(祖賢) and [Hisho](#), however, weren't satisfied by that. Although [Tōshaku](#) were broken splendidly, it was not seemed as a good sign. Around the shooting-arrow ceremony, many officials [Hisho](#) got used to seeing got missing. The Ruler who lose the people's trust looked at the scenes of [Tōshaku](#) broken, it was very chilly and empty, even if pottery birds looked like brilliant flowers, played beautiful music with sweet smell.

Still —no therefore, Soken(祖賢) was eager to make new devices.

“This time we will make the Ruler feel better.”

In the courtyard, when Soken(祖賢) rode astride his chair and told what he thought, he was like a little child thinking a trick.

“Yes, but how, sir?”

[Hisho](#) asked, Soken(祖賢) turned his face skyward saying “Uh...”

“It is not enough gaily and flowery, but more exhilaratingly. I don't talk about feeling high, I talk about feeling warm and smiling unconsciously. He has an unconscious smile on his face and looks all round. He finds the same kind of smile on the faces of top aides. They see it each other, they feel connected with themselves and happy. — How is that?”

Hisho smiled wryly.

“You say always such a thing that I do not see or so.”

“Don’t you know about it? Well, when we happen to see a heartwarming scene, we feel something. We see each other’s faces which are laughing, and find to be able to relate to each other, like that —”

“I know what feeling you talk about. But I don’t know how to pull into shape.”

“Shape,” said Soken(祖賢), tilting his head slightly to one side, and said again doing it to another side.

“Well, I guess Gagaku(雅樂) doesn’t fits my thought.”

Gagaku(雅樂), that is also called Gasei(雅声), is an abbreviation of the elegant and orthodox music. It is classical music which is used for great religious services or a ceremony of the nation and played only by traditional instruments, the songs sung with it are not music, but prayers. The composition suits more a magic spell by the arrangement of sound than a melodious music. Although it is profound and solemn, in it much of the pleasure of music doesn’t still remain.

“So, do we take folk songs?”

Soken(祖賢) jumped while answering yes.

“That’s good. Not a voluptuous song they sing at a banquet. More lighter song —.”

“Like children’s songs?”

“It isn’t bad. Work songs are suitable, too. Well, house wives often sing together when they wash at the riverside. We play some music from here, and others from there. What do you think?”

As [Hisho](#) with a wry smile looked at Soken(祖賢) who brightened his eyes, [Hisho](#) turned a look to Shōran(蕭蘭). Sitting on the stone of the end of the courtyard and throwing a pear fruit, Shōran(蕭蘭) heard their talk and had a smile, which was a nanny’s smile who has this kind of difficult little children.

“Yes, I don’t mind to do what you say.”

Shōran(蕭蘭) threw the last fruit. On the bottom of the valley small pear woods were going to grow because she continued to do this patiently.

“But, using folk songs is more difficult than using Gagaku(雅樂). Gagaku(雅樂) has mechanical styles by its theory, though, folk songs have a various chaos.”

“But, you can, Shōran(蕭蘭)?”

The old man pulled her hands as if pestering her. Shōran(蕭蘭) smiled wryly and looked at [Hisho](#). He held his laughing and showed a sigh.

“We must tune their sound by breaking birds actually and prepare them one by one. Tuning by our own ears. And following it, we will shoot the birds. We need a throwing machine again.”

“Some from here, others from there.”

Soken(祖賢) declared proudly. [Hisho](#) nodded.

“Yes, we need a lot of throwing machines. A throwing machine per a song, we must decide a position exactly by plural marks, where an archer will break a bird.”

“Oops, it’s a big job. All Tōkan(冬官) must be mobilized again.”

Shōran(蕭蘭) also sighed but still smiled. Devising materials, throwing machines, production of birds themselves —she always needed team play in the end, as a result she got into a big thing with the whole Tōkan-fu(冬官府). But strangely Tōshō(冬匠) doesn’t make a disagreeable face. That’s a craftsman, like Shōran(蕭蘭) too, who rise to an unreasonable demand. Soken(祖賢) and [Hisho](#)’s plan is a very difficult one which nobody has made, they are willing to help them, in spite of complaining apparently.

[Hisho](#) himself is none other than this kind of craftsman. Making [Tōshaku](#) superior to the last time which had the goal forced by other people was painful. But, to carry out the unreasonable demand looking positive is pleasant. He was glad at this time because he had hard time before.

Did Seikō(青江) come into Rajin-fu(羅人府) as a craftsman exactly these days? Though Seikō(青江) wasn’t still good as a craftsman, but even he was dedicating joyfully to manual works.

—But one day, Soken(祖賢) was suddenly taken away by soldiers who intruded.

[Hisho](#) still doesn’t know why it happened. He knows Soken(祖賢) led to suspicion of plotting a rebellion, but Soken(祖賢) never had treacheries to the Ruler. He was probably implicated in the crime of rebellion by a misunderstanding — or a lie, but the circumstances were too complicated and there was no ways by which [Hisho](#) could know what happened. His appeal that rebellion by Soken(祖賢) never occurred did not reach anywhere. First of all, he did not know about whom to appeal for help. Shishi(司士) who is [Sekichō-shi](#)’s superior avoided [Hisho](#) for fear of implication, Taiei(太衛) and [Daishiba](#), the bosses of Shishi(司士), were on the clouds and [Hisho](#) had no method of meeting them, even if appealing to help

him. Although he wrote a complaint, he got no answer, and he didn't know whether it was even in the hands of high officials.

As you, of course, know, ordinary people have no powers— he did not remember who said so and consoled him. [Hisho](#) and Shōran(蕭蘭)'s friends and acquaintances said they should be glad that they were not implicated in the case. Because Soken(祖賢) probably protected them at the risk of his own life. There were no doubts that [Hisho](#) and Shōran(蕭蘭) were never in the conspiracy and they were never examined at all. That broke him up much more. When Shishi(司士) met him at last, he told [Hisho](#) the worst thing. As Soken(祖賢) had no relatives, [Hisho](#) should take his body.

He had no more rage and no more tears. Doing as he was told, he took away Soken(祖賢)'s severed head, holding it with his hands, he got into A conviction.

—Magpie(鵲)'s voices are signs of joy. To shoot them down can't be an auspicious sign.

It is wrong to please an audience by seeing [Tōshaku](#) being shot, broken and fallen. Essentially, we should not shoot [Tōshaku](#). Never hit, never break. But, the shooting-arrow ceremony is an event about shooting [Tōshaku](#). Though shooting down [Tōshaku](#) should be banned, Ruler's power forces it for a courtesy event. It is not an auspicious sign but an ominous sign. If the Ruler mistakes how to use the power, it brings ominous events to the world. He believed that the shooting-arrow ceremony is the event in which they have confirmation of this.

“We will remove all smells from them.”

One day, after finishing Soken(祖賢)'s funeral, [Hisho](#) showed up to the workshops and told Shōran(蕭蘭) so. ‘Oh dear’, Shōran(蕭蘭) dilated her eyes and regarded her hands embarrassedly.

“I don't mind. —But, we made it this far with considerable effort at last.”

There were rolling a lot of small silver balls in a small plate. In these balls the perfumed oil which Soken(祖賢) aimed at was contained. Soken(祖賢) was particular about their scent. He wanted not only good scent but the scent with which they felt happy. Happy —and satisfied, he claimed such a smell is good enough. He consulted with woodworkers of Tōkan(冬官), came to the workshops everyday and made up the perfumed oil. The size of the balls of perfumed oil was also devised so that it may be fragrant with elegance, at this moment, Soken(祖賢) was already killed, but it was just completed at last.

“No smell is better. We will also change the sounds of Tōshaku being broken. More dismal sound is better. The music we use is not good being lively. On the contrary, I think Gagaku(雅樂) of the funeral for the late Ruler is more suitable.”

Shōran(蕭蘭) sighed, giving a wry smile moderately.

“You say to me to redo all, don’t you?”

Shōran(蕭蘭) looked at the small plate again. She looked sorry —or sad.

“But, even if you desire so, we cannot use the Gagaku(雅樂) of the funeral. We cannot call it a celebration.”

“O.K. You can use folk songs. But I don’t need happy songs. Less tones. I want lonelier music.”

“I see.” Shōran(蕭蘭) murmured without emotions, and said nothing. Although they made up Tōshaku they removed smells from them and let them play lonely sounds, they had no opportunity to show it to Ruler Ri(惣). The Ruler Ri(惣)’s reign had ended on its 68th year.

Hisho continued making Tōshaku during next interregnums. Unnoticed, he became to see people’s image on Tōshaku’s because of Seikō(青江)’s words.

“Why is it a magpie(鵲)?”

Seikō(青江) was extremely skilled with his hands and had a good brain. After Soken(祖賢)'s death, Shōran(蕭蘭) kept Seikō(青江) with her and trained him eagerly as if she tried to fill the big hole.

“They say that magpie(鵲)'s voices are a sign of joy.”

Seikō(青江) listened to [Hisho](#)'s explanation and tilted his head.

“There are probably other birds as auspicious. Why not a more beautiful or more precious one? Strange.”

‘Exactly’, Shōran(蕭蘭) stopped her hand from working and her eyes were brightened with interest.

“I think you're right. Even if Hōō(鳳凰) or Ranchō(鸞鳥) would be good.”

People can't possibly shoot down Hōō(鳳凰) or Ranchō(鸞鳥) — [Hisho](#) smiled wryly, but thinking about it again, this was very strange.

Magpies(鵲) aren't precious. They are ordinary birds that are seen in a village or agricultural land every day. It has a black head and black wings like a crow, only the belly and the root of the wings are white. And a long tail. A tail as long as the body which is also the same color as a crow. Though slender wings and a long tail are graceful, it has neither exceptionally beautiful color nor eye-catching markings. It doesn't have a particularly beautiful voice. It is an ordinary bird like a sparrow or a crow, at the beginning of spring it picks the ground, and nuts when autumn comes. It is a lot more common to see this birds walking and hopping on the ground than flying in the air.

—He considered suddenly they seemed like people.

Very ordinary people who are anywhere. They wrap themselves in simple clothes and spend most of their lifetime cultivating the ground. They have neither particularly outstanding skills nor are very attractive. If they keep to hone their skills or be diligent in their studies, the highest position they can rise will probably be just that of a lower class official like [Hisho](#), they cannot rise up on the clouds. But, they didn't hate it and continued to make their lives innocently —and that's all.

Magpies(鶲) are people rightly. If they are satisfied and collapse from laughter, singing with joy, it will be a good sign for a Ruler exactly. People's joy is a proof that the Ruler's reign is right. If people sing and chatter, a reign of Ruler will be to continue for a long time.

He thought his intuition is right in that shooting [Tōshaku](#) and feel happy is a mistake. The power which Ruler has shoots people. People who are shot break into pieces. To shot down and be happy is absolutely wrong. By daring to make a mistake, we make them taste the fear of the power —We should make them experience it.

He wanted to make [Tōshaku](#), which archers felt guilty to who shot down and break.

But —.

“—I have been digging up all things as much as possible.”

He came to himself by an unexpected voice. When [Hisho](#) looked back, he found Seikō(青江) who had just come back and held volumes of paper.

“Fortunately, all plans by you remained.”

‘Oh’, [Hisho](#) breathed out.

“Then, choose a good one from them.”

Seikō(青江) drooped his head.

“...Do you think my skills are that poor?”

“I think you’ve got it wrong.”

Seikō(青江) shook his head in silence. [Hisho](#) murmured again, “you guess wrong.” He suddenly remembered his palm with a large weight on it, and found it still holding the [Tōshaku](#).

They tried to choose and make a good one from them, but, this was too difficult for [Hisho](#) who already expected it to be difficult. Even if the plans remained, [Tōshaku](#) were actually made by Shōran(蕭蘭) and owed a lot of processes to their delicate handiwork, hers and Tōshō(冬匠)’s. Both materials and techniques, Tōshō(冬匠) who was in charge reached details through a trial and error process. If you have neither eyes nor hands of the Tōshō(冬匠), you never know its moderation. Though it was craftsman that actually made it, the master helped them by oral instructions or directly at the workplace. In other words, it was necessary to do it again from the beginning if Tōshō(冬匠) who was actually related to the work didn’t exist anymore. Besides —to make things worse, [Kei](#) had always had a lot of troubles since the end of Ruler Ri(烈)’s reign. Many of craftsmen disappeared so that Shōran(蕭蘭) didn’t live here anymore, and the number of craftsmen who remember moderations were limited. It was impossible to make past [Tōshaku](#) at once. Many of the processes should be tried and erred from the beginning —then, there’s no difference between making old or new. That makes new things easier not to be bound by past records.

He thought so but couldn't make a move. In the mean time he was not able to be a bad loser and continued to choose one of the old plans, the new Ruler formally took the throne. In accordance with ancient ritual, when the new Ruler entered the palace, all officials, higher and lower, welcomed her on the clouds, but he could not see Her Majesty because he as the lower was so far away from her. He could know neither her face nor her personality. Only one thing leaves no doubt, which seeped from above the clouds, was that she is a girl who came from another world. They say the girl does not know much about common sense and is very nervous.

‘Again’, this thought let him lose his energy for making [Tōshaku](#).

Ruler Haku(薄) ignored the power, and was drowned at the luxurious life. She rose to the highest position, obtaining extreme luxury and going into raptures, she never came down to the ground. In contrast, Ruler Hi(比) was interested only in power. She was pleased that all her officials and people at her command were willing and able. And, Ruler Yo(予) was interested in neither of them. She secluded herself at the depth of the palace and stayed there for a long time. She denied the power or even both, her people and her country. When she showed herself in the imperial court at last, she already became a tyrant who went out of the ordinary way.

As soon as the New Ruler had entered the palace, [Hisho](#) was called again by [Sekichō-shi](#). Same as before, [Suiryō](#) was courteous and familiar like trying to gain [Hisho](#)’s favor.

“Well, did you get a good idea?”

[Suiryō](#) knitted his brows embarrassedly, when he heard [Hisho](#) replied shortly “No”. Next, he was with a smile as mediating [Hisho](#).

“Fortunately or unfortunately, the next shooting-arrow ceremony seems to be

delayed from our expectation. They will let Taisha(大射) be postponed until next time.”

“Postponed — ?”

Suiryō wrinkled his face when Hisho asked back with doubt.

“Don’t ask me the reason why they do that. I never know about it. It might be the New Ruler’s intention — or, it might be the intention of important people, who knows?”

It could happen, Hisho nodded.

“We will have the first Taisha(大射) for the New Ruler at Kōshi(郊祀). I’m sorry that we can’t show Her Majesty a good Taisha(大射) at her coronation, but we have more time now due to that.”

Kōshi(郊祀), that is a ceremony for praying for the happiness of the country to the gods, is held on the winter solstice. Especially, the first Kōshi(郊祀) is very important for the New Ruler and the country. The first Kōshi(郊祀) has a Taisha(大射) naturally. —It is absolutely sure. Even if Hisho makes it by an original idea from nothing, it will be working in time because he has more than two months until the winter solstice.

“The future of all Kakan rests on your shoulders. I dump everything on you. And you, save our faces by making something good.”

It is very necessary to make [Tōshaku](#). Now, he has no time to think about something unnecessary.

He gave up complaining and seated himself at his table. [Hisho](#) had his office in one of the buildings of Rajin-fu(羅人府). There were two tables and two couches in the room which was not very wide. It was a place where he had settled down with Soken(祖賢) before. One of the tables and one of the couches already became a storage The table that [Hisho](#) had been using was indeed settled, but, dust lay thick everywhere because he had not come here for a long time. He cleaned up the dust on the table for the meantime, expanded paper reluctantly, ground an ink-cake, and took a [writing brush](#). —And, his movement stopped.

There was nothing inside of [Hisho](#).

There was only blank even if he tried to imagine something.

[Hisho](#) always said that his creative power was exhausted. But, actually he thought he only lost his drive. The passion of wanting to try this or to do that, had certainly run out. He never imagined nothing came to mind.

It's because he chucked up his job too long. —He wondered, though he tried to recall how he worked out thoughts before, it didn't come out even vaguely.

When he had thought what was next, he had felt short on ideas. But even at that moment, in his brain he had had a lot of idea fragments. Just if something was chosen from among them, he couldn't get very enthusiastic about it. Or, somehow, if choosing something attractive, he couldn't continue with it. —This was to find it difficult. That is not to find noting in his brain. —This was the first time he experienced that he had a complete blank like cottons in his own brain.

He was absolutely shocked by it. And he felt pressed. A moderate number of [Tōshaku](#) will be needed if becoming Taisha(大射). Only to get the number required, workmen working round-the-clock will take half a month. They need complete [Tōshaku](#) to be finished trying and erring, test-shooting, adjustments, before they secure the number required. If he really wants them from complete beginning, he needs to start immediately. He needs something but has nothing.

— ‘Got it,’ he understood. ‘I, already dead.’

When? He didn’t know. At Shōran(蕭蘭) disappearing? —at Ruler Yo(予) giving him a word? Or long time ago? Since Soken(祖賢) had been gone, thinking people were as [Tōshaku](#), [Hisho](#) was obsessed with making [Tōshaku](#) continuously, but the obsession, from the start, might be completely different from the passion to make [Tōshaku](#).

Certainly, [Hisho](#) had not felt pleasure by making [Tōshaku](#) during that period.

— You should have made it more beautiful.

Shōran(蕭蘭) smiled wryly and said so whenever he gave her instructions. Each time, Hisho repeated. He thinks it is wrong to be pleased by seeing [Tōshaku](#) broken.

“It is cruel that [Tōshaku](#) are shot and fall down.”

To face reality, [Hisho](#) showed her the valley seen from the window. The gorge placed between huge peaks, though pear trees growing luxuriantly blot it out, there lies the lower world which is neglected by the Ruler and trampled down by power in the bottom.

“The crude administration of an incapable ruler ruins the country. People are made a fool by the politics that aren’t well thought, and everyone is starving and has become poor. The Ruler can save them with one finger or push them down into further poverty. The Ruler can take their lives. The Ruler has to know about

it.”

Shōran(蕭蘭) sighed in amazement and disbelief.

“I wonder if the Ruler could understand. If someone can understand it by seeing Tōshaku broken, I think someone has already done it before.”

“I guess you are probably right.”

There’s some truth in what Shōran(蕭蘭) says. But if so, what can he do?

“Is it the only thing we can do? Make Tōshaku for the Ruler we cannot respect? Even if we can please the Ruler and her aides on each scene, what will it do for the people?”

“But, that’s our job.”

Shōran(蕭蘭) said so naturally and her appearance as she kept calmly working irritated him. He was angrier because she looked happy and seemed to be satisfied.

“Yes, both of us are officials but insignificant ones. We don’t take part in important affairs of state, our intentions cannot be reflected in national administration because of our position. But, we are still officials. People’s livings fall on our shoulders. I at least want to do something for people through my duty. —That’s our only obligation.”

Shōran(蕭蘭) chuckled without raising her face.

“For people — huh.”

“Then, what do you think Ra-shi(羅氏) and Rajin(羅人) should be?”
“should be?”

Shōran(蕭蘭) said and laughed amazedly.

“You don’t think all human beings are the same, do you? We all do our assignment. So, if the difficult Ra-shi(羅氏) gives a difficult instruction to me, I would follow it carefully. Right?”

“Nothing changes when you look away from reality.”

“Though my eye catches them even if I look away. — I think the Ruler isn’t different from me. If we show her things that she doesn’t want to see, she would only deny them.”

“—Like when you shut your eyes from the lower world by hiding it under the pear trees?”

As he had a sting in his talk, Shōran(蕭蘭) shrugged her shoulders.

“What else can I do by looking at the ruined lower world? It’s better to see beautiful things than that, isn’t it? It is foolish to contemplate an unpleasant thing purposely and to have unpleasant time.”

“So? You shut yourself up in your workshop and look at your desk with your head down all day. Only in such a shut place, you might feel happy.”

“Of course,” Shōran(蕭蘭) laughed loudly.

“It doesn’t exist there only, but it does exist only there. I love workmanship. Go well or go wrong —I love both of them.”

After her words, she took her file in her hand. She began to polish a piece of silver handiwork.

“I’m very happy to confine my attention to the workmanship and not to think about anything else...”

Shōran(蕭蘭) giggled after talking to herself.

“To your surprise, people might be also the same as me? A woman you are pitying might be spending every day trying not to think about the Ruler but to be pleased that today’s dish is good or there’s good weather and the laundry dries well.”

After saying so, she suddenly sat up straight and put on a serious look because of Hisho’s unpleasant reaction.

“Yes. I’ll obey Ra-shi(羅氏)’s instructions. With pleasure.”

Hisho thinks Shōran(蕭蘭) didn’t have the will to face reality. She was not very interested in the people and the country. She tried to look for a little pleasure in her own backyard than misery there. Though she cried herself hoarse when Soken(祖賢) was executed, she might only feel sad because someone close to her died. Indeed, compared to Hisho carrying it for a long time, she recovered in a shorter time. She said it was sorry but it ended.

As Shōran(蕭蘭) had such an attitude, most craftsmen in Rajin-fu(羅人府) had the same behavior. Without taking interest about that, they carried on with serious mood because they were ordered by Hisho who is Ra-shi(羅氏). Nobody understood Hisho and he was isolated. Sekichō-shi who are Soken(祖賢)’s

successors left it to [Hisho](#) and thought it's enough, without a lot of interest in what [Hisho](#) made up. They had their interest in [Hisho](#)'s results only. People on the clouds being pleased with it or not. And, [Hisho](#) satisfied most successive [Sekichō-shis](#).

Most of them were pleased with [Hisho](#)'s [Tōshaku](#). Sometimes they said "There is no cheerfulness", but they more often praised it as solemn and beautiful. It's not always their real opinion. They might have had an illusion that they needed to praise it because famous Ra-shi(羅氏) in Ra-shi(羅氏) had made it. However, there was nothing better to knock down [Hisho](#) than somebody saying radiantly that it was splendid. He charged his products with significance, but nobody felt it. After the ceremony, the archer who was a soldier visited [Hisho](#) and said that it moved his heart because it was really painful and sad. This was very ironic for him. A person whose position is low felt it. —A person whose position is high didn't. [Hisho](#)'s intention never reached the person who had to get it.

[Hisho](#) was absorbed in making [Tōshaku](#). Two female rulers showed up and they disappeared. Often times, they didn't have a ruler in the throne and held no Taisha(大射) though, [Hisho](#) did not stop devising. But —At last, the day when Hisho's intension reached a Ruler came.

It was the Ruler Yo(予)'s enthronement ceremony.

The [Tōshaku](#) with long graceful wings and tail were pushed away and took flight from the throwing machine rather than being tossed up, and it fluttered sliding into the air. It seemed to see birds that flew down from a sky height. When the archer shot it, it made a weak sound, dispersed a five-colored spray, and was broken into two wings and the tail. It fluttered down like struggling. While fluttered down, its sound remained weakly like a scream. The wings falling down slammed painfully to the ground, and were broken to pieces while making a pathetic clear sound. It became fragments of red crystal at the same time as breaking and scattered. When the shooting-arrow ceremony ended, the royal garden was vermillioned by the fragments of shining crystal.

Shōten-den(承天殿), where the Ruler and the high officials sat in a row, and the garden in front of it were filled with silence. [Hisho](#) heard their quiet, heavy silence and realized his intention had reached their mind at last. After the ceremony he was called by the Ruler, he took her words directly even through the bamboo blind.

But her first words were “It is frightening”.

“Why did you show me horribly ominous things? I would not like to see such cruelty.”

[Hisho](#) lost all words. Yes, that’s very cruel, so he wanted her to see it. It was certainly cruel if the people were killed. He wanted her to confirm what she had on her hands with the ceremony.

“Her Majesty can hurt very much.”

Saiho(宰輔) also said so. But, he wanted her to feel the pain, of course. And, he wanted her to imagine people’s pain from it. The deeper scars, the more difficult to forget. He wanted the cruelty to remain etched into her memory with deep pain.

Even if people shut their eyes to the cruelty, it cannot vanish. They wouldn’t be able to become conscious of all the cruelty.

It cut the Ruler deep, but didn’t reach to her mind. —[Hisho](#) was at a loss. What else should he do? [Hisho](#) lost the desire to make [Tōshaku](#) rapidly after this. At the Kōshi(郊祀) after ascending the throne, they didn’t hold Taisha(大射) itself. Though [Sekichō-shi](#) did not know the reason either, [Hisho](#) thinks the Ruler maybe told them she did not want to see it. Still, he didn’t give up making [Tōshaku](#). At the time —yet.

[Hisho](#) came frequently to the town since then. He looked at people's livings closely and sometimes visited even the battlefield and the execution ground. He could obtain any thoughts by witnessing misery, couldn't he? He might look for something that inspired himself who tended to wilt.

Shōran(蕭蘭) received them with a wry smile, whenever he took something that he picked up to Rajin-fu(羅人府). [Tōshaku](#) which had no recipient. —[Hisho](#) continued to make them and to throw them out for years, without understanding, what he had to make. And one day, when [Hisho](#) returned, he didn't see Shōran(蕭蘭) there.

That day, clouds hanged heavily. The previous night, at the lower world people had frost, even ears of rice had not ripened. While he heard the anxious voice —"What's going on?" —of the people who looked up at heavens, he finished a brief trip, came back to [Gyōten](#) and returned up to [Jichō](#). At that time, what original idea he picked up and where he found it out, he currently can't recall any more. Some idea occurred to him surely, he was very eager to come back to Tōkan-fu(冬官府) —and he suddenly noticed all the workshops filled with a strange silence.

An invisible huge thing seemed to press hard on everything around here. He felt something, mood of disquiet, and arrived at Rajin-fu(羅人府), and did not see Shōran(蕭蘭). Shōran(蕭蘭)'s room looked the same as always. Her desk where the things were piled up and the tools were thrown out, it seemed as if she left her seat for a little while. Nevertheless, as soon as he entered her room, [Hisho](#) felt the empty freezing cold there. There was nothing missing but the room was completely empty. Seikō(青江) ran into the room when he was vacantly looking for something.

"Mr. [Hisho](#) —I've seen you."

Seikō(青江)'s face was as white as a sheet.

“Where is Shōran(蕭蘭)?”

“My master is absent. I have not seen her in the morning. I haven’t seen her anywhere though I looked for her here and there. I can’t understand what happened. —But,”

Seikō(青江) trembled discernibly.

“Not only my master. Craftsmen have disappeared from workshops here and there. Women —only.”

Hisho became frozen.

“...Only women?”

“Yes. They say soldiers took away the master of the comb craftsmen before the dawn. Only the women also have been similarly carried off from the construction section. —Mr. Hisho, what’s this?”

Hisho caught Seikō(青江)’s trembling. His knees began to shake. —He was unable to stay on his feet.

“...So, I told her that she should have run away!”

He didn’t know what Ruler Yo(予) had been thinking about when she ordered it. About three months ago, the Ruler who was staying in the inside of the palace showed up abruptly in the court, ordered all female officials to get out of the palace and to leave Kei. Nobody received this seriously at first, though it alluded to the worst penalty when people didn’t observe orders.

Because, recently, most laws which were given from the throne were such as

this. The law was promulgated ostentatiously, but it lacked clearness of purpose and concreteness. Although only an official notice was put out, the government authorities didn't show zeal for operation, therefore most ended as mere information. Also at this time, it lacked veracity as all female officials were banished not only from the palace but also the country. Nearly half of the government officials in the court were women. Nobody knew how long it took for an enormous number of women to leave the palace, and the biggest point was that national administration didn't continue if all were banished.

Though they took it so lightly at the beginning, some female officials really began to disappear on the clouds after a while. Most of them collected their own belongings and got away from the palace, but some of them who obviously didn't seem to run away disappeared.

You'd better run away, [Hisho](#) told Shōran(蕭蘭).

“Apparently, Her Majesty is serious though it is very hard to believe for me. This is not a token notice like the usual one.”

No way, Shōran(蕭蘭) laughed while sitting at her desk as usual.

“I've never heard such a ridiculous notice.”

“But, higher-class female officials have actually disappeared.”

When [Hisho](#) appealed, Shōran(蕭蘭) inclined her head.

“I wonder if she fought against a female official. If she did so, I am not worried. Because the Ruler doesn't know me. I don't think the Ruler imagines that there are lower officials in [Jichō](#) and that some of them are women. She cannot punish me because she doesn't know I exist, can she?”

Though she laughed after saying so, he thought that her recognition was too optimistic. The fact was that she simply disappeared one day. He didn't know even how and where she was, if she was dead or alive as well as other female craftsmen. All was decided on the clouds, and under the clouds nobody was able to explain what had happened. No one that disappeared, however, came back again. Now, Ruler Yo(予) passed away, and the New Ruler ascends the throne, but he has no communication of any kind with the disappeared. Only that it is an undeniable fact.

—Therefore, I told you not to look away from reality.

[Hisho](#) thought so ever since. Because Shōran(蕭蘭) did not try to see the cruelty at all. Her impression of the Ruler was optimistic, and her precaution against the power was insufficient. Didn't she think that the misery would reach her if looking away? Did she forget that Soken(祖賢) wasn't guilty but was killed anyway?

He was both exasperated and sad. After Shōran(蕭蘭) had disappeared, [Hisho](#)'s will to make [Tōshaku](#) was completely lost.

[Hisho](#) was too helpless. Both Soken(祖賢) and Shōran(蕭蘭) were lost. He even could know neither what happened nor who was to blame. In spite of their innocence, he could neither guard nor protect them. Inside the palace —though he is in the Ruler's neighborhood.

It was wrong, and he wanted to shout for it to stop. [Hisho](#) had, however, no method of sending the shout to the Ruler. In fact, he didn't have even a way to send it to Saiho(宰輔) or the Palace aides. His cry could not reach the Ruler if he shouted continuously toward the clouds. [Hisho](#) was almost nonexistent from the beginning for people on the clouds. There were none who tried to listen, and they did not feel even the necessity. The only method of [Hisho](#)'s telling a Ruler something was the shooting-arrow ceremony. That's why [Hisho](#) tried his wish to

be reached through the shooting-arrow ceremony, but it wasn't reached. —No, even worse. It was not accepted though it was reached.

He hoped Ruler Yo(予) would have understood the cruelty of the power by the shooting-arrow ceremony that she herself said "It is frightening".

However, Ruler Yo(予) refused to understand. She did not notice her own cruelty because she looked away from the cruel things.

—This country is hopeless.

He got tired of the search for the message that had to be raised and of raising the message. Anyway, the Ruler showed little interest in [Hisho](#). Although he stayed in Ra-shi(羅氏) because eating to live is necessary for a person, he lost a will to make [Tōshaku](#) and hated even to think of them. He wanted to think neither the government nor the country. Even if he thought something, he had no way to send it to the clouds, and they had no will to listen him at all.

Everything seemed meaningless to him. He felt troublesome even raising a finger, stayed in his residence and spent all his time there. He did nothing. He thought nothing. Probably the empty days he spent his life doing nothing made a big hole in [Hisho](#).

I am a mere shell. —[Hisho](#) thought, gave up and put down his [writing brush](#).

He thought of nothing, then they had no choice except remaking the past ones. Could they make it in time if those were made? He had to consult with Seikō(青江).

He got out from the room while thinking. A lonely night breeze announcing

autumn blew through the corridor enclosing the courtyard.

The Tōshaku that was dedicated to Ruler Yo(予) would be safe. The producer was Shōran(蕭蘭), but it was Seikō(青江) who actually bundled craftsmen and created them. Seikō(青江) probably remembered details. He thought, however, he would meet with a refusal again if he remade them. Even if he did not meet with a refusal, Hisho himself did not want to make them again. He did not want to dare to make Tōshaku that only shouted cruelty. Then, it might be correct to make the Ruler Ri(惣)’s Tōshaku, but he didn’t feel like doing so.

He did not want those which had been broken splendidly like that. He did not want to leave any thoughts with Tōshaku anymore, but he also did not feel much like making Tōshaku that were broken and opened up and that made the audience applaud. It is also painful to show Ruler Yo(予)’s Tōshaku which were shot and broken. He wanted them not to break if possible, though no breaking is no meaning.

“...I couldn’t do such a thing though.”

Hisho smiled to himself. There’s no meaning unless Tōshaku are shot down. Though, actually, he could do nothing but destruction, he also did not feel good that they would play music after being broken. Both profound Gagaku(雅樂) and lonely folksongs do not fit them. In the first place he wants no music. He wants a more quiet and simple tone. Just the sound that makes stopping cheer and applause and listening avidly to. The tone deeply sinking in one’s ears and opening them.

He came into the next room while thinking, he said shared thoughts with Seikō(青江) who sat at the desk by the weak light, Seikō(青江) looked back inclining his head still on his chair.

“For instance —Snow sound?”

[Hisho](#) smiled wryly while sitting on boxes piled up beside Seikō(青江).

“Snow has no sound, doesn’t it?”

“No”, Seikō(青江) blushed.

“Well, splash or whish?”

That’s not it —splash, [Hisho](#) thinks. He thinks it differs from all the water sound that runs over, flows, murmur, and ripples. But it also differs from all the wind sound. Both water and wind are too talky.

“More silent... yes —you’re right, it might be snow’s sound.”

Though it’s saying nothing, people can’t help but listen to —.

“Snow has no sound, but my feeling fits it if it exists. How did you know?”

Seikō(青江) smiled embarrassedly when [Hisho](#) said so.

“Because my master said something similar. ...Ah, you’ve said the same thing, I think.”

[Hisho](#) asked it back in surprise.

“Shōran(蕭蘭) did?”

“Yes. She said she preferred snow’s sound such as a sound of silence. She told

me she would prefer to do so if possible."

Hisho was at a loss for words.

—Well, he did not give her a chance for doing what she wanted to do.

In fact, Hisho never once asked what Tōshaku she wanted to make. And she never said what she wanted to make. While Hisho was obstinately making cruel Tōshaku, she said he should have made it more beautiful though, she never told concrete plans and never gave him a look at her desire.

She also wished. Shōran(蕭蘭) hoped for it, too. He thought.

“...Anything else?”

“Yes?”

“Did she say anything else? About how to break?”

When Hisho asked it again, Seikō(青江) looked at the ground and turned things over in his mind.

“She told me Ruler Yo(予)’s birds were cruel. She said it’s painful. But if they are broken colorfully, it is too cheerful, which is not interesting. That is what she said.”

Saying so, Seikō(青江) looked up suddenly recalling something.

“Now, I remember she said birds were good. It’s very painful for them to be shot down, so it’s good for them to be birds again from pieces.”

“Birds again...”

Seikō(青江) nodded his head longingly.

“She said as long as they were birds. She wished they were flying. They keeping to fly, the ceremony would not finish but she wanted people to feel sorry when they were just shot down. When people felt sorry, birds would be born again from the ruins.”

“And, they are flying away...?”

As Hisho murmured unconsciously, Seikō(青江) smiled with satisfaction.

“Yes —She said so. She wished real magpies(鶲) were born from broken Tōshaku. And went flying away.”

“That’s not bad.”

Tōshaku are thrown up. Shot and broken to pieces, real magpies(鶲) are born from them, and they will fly away in front of people sitting in a row, yes, they will leave everything behind, the Ruler, the power of the throne, all the officials’ authorities and motives—.

“She said she didn’t like that the birds which were born with considerable effort fell and remained in the yard. Disappearing is fitter for her feeling.”

“Fitter... she said?”

Hisho nodded. He thought that Shōran(蕭蘭) had same feelings though she had said nothing. No, only Hisho did not show a will to hear it. Only his desires were stubbornly chased, and he reached at last the same place when his hope was lost

—

Hisho looked back on the west side window. At the moment he could only see the darkness there but in daytime he could have seen the scenery of the valley. The rock surface would be covered with thin clouds, and pear trees would interrupt the view where the town should be seen.

“Shōran(蕭蘭) had often seen that scenery, hadn’t she?”

Seikō(青江) traced the direction of Hisho’s eyes, and he threw up his eyes with a confused look.

“...Of the valley? Well, yes.”

“What did she see really?”

At this late date he wonders. Why was she looking at the valley and what did she think?

“She said she did not want to see the lower place. I thought that it was true because she said so. But my thinking about it more deeply, if she did not want to look there, I don’t think she should have seen the valley in the first place. Sitting on the stone on the end of the courtyard, she had often seen the valley, but I think that direction we can see only the lower place.”

Hearing something he didn’t expect, Seikō(青江) also put his head on one side.

“It seems to be true, come to think of it.”

Hisho recalled the bird he had seen before. At that time he felt the bird was seeing the devastation only. Just like that bird, wasn’t she seeing the devastation while saying ‘I don’t want to see’?

“Am I thinking too much?”

When [Hisho](#) smiles wryly, Seikō(青江) asks it back.

“What?”

“Nothing... She said she did not want to see the lower world although she was able to see nothing but the lower world. And, she planted pears patiently. How patient she was, she hid the misery of the lower place by her behavior at last, though.”

“She hid it... didn’t she?”

“Am I wrong?”

‘I don’t know.’ Seikō(青江) put his head on one side.

“Certainly my master often said she didn’t want to see the lower world. Nevertheless she always saw there. —Yes, I think she must have seen the lower place. Because at the end of her gaze was [Gyōten](#).”

“Precisely, pear trees. Especially, she worn a smile and gazed when the flowers bloomed.”

“But, she still saw the same place in the middle of winter. Winter coming, pears’ leaves fall. At that time, we can see nothing but the scenery of the lower world.”
“It’s true what you say....”

Seikō(青江) stood up and approached the window. The autumn-like breeze with the sign of loneliness was blowing in.

“I suppose she did not want to see the lower world because she was well aware of the misery of it. So, she said that. Actually, she said she did not want to hear

painful news, but she always knew about it before I told her.”

“Did she?”

“Yes. —I think she couldn’t help straining her ears for the sound that she did not want to hear. In a similar way, she wanted not to see it because she knew how it was, but she couldn’t help seeing. She planted pear trees, but she did not plan to hide the lower world, I guess...”

Trying to find a word, Seikō(青江) looked through the lower world in the dark.

“When the flower bloomed, she was highly pleased. She said what beautiful scenery it was, which does not mean that the flowers erased the lower world, I think. My master might surely have superimposed the flowers on the lower world. I think she saw the beautiful [Gyōten](#) that might be realized someday when she enjoyed the flowers.”

Maybe so, [Hisho](#) thought.

“I thought Shōran(蕭蘭) was always turning her back on reality...”

Seikō(青江) smiled turning around.

“Certainly right. Actually, she did not face the reality squarely. Turning her back on it, she had been looking at her own hands only. But I don’t think she refused the reality.”

[Hisho](#) nodded... He understood in some way. The method of blockage like [Hisho](#) might have said to deny the reality. Like staying in one’s residence and waste all one’s time. Although Shōran(蕭蘭) stayed inside and turned her back on the world the same as [Hisho](#) did, she never stopped making [Tōshaku](#) and finding out

her pleasure at her moving hands. At this late date, he thought that might have been Shōran(蕭蘭)'s method for facing the world.

She kept seeing the lower world. Saying not to want to see the devastation, she was eager for the day when the lower world would be filled with flowers —.

“We will make the Tōshaku Shōran(蕭蘭) might have wanted.”

When Hisho said so, Seikō(青江) nodded painfully —However, surely gladly.

“As much as possible, you will recall what Shōran(蕭蘭) would want to make.”

The first bird was a blue transparent one like water.

The bird, which flew away from the west-side tall building next to Shōten-den(承天殿) where Ruler and aides sat in a row behind the bamboo blind, had long wings and a long tail. Gradually going round the vast yard surrounded by tall buildings, the bird that seemed to harden the bluish sky of winter suddenly changed direction, and ran up to the sky height while shining like crystal.

An arrow was shot by one of the archers sitting in a row under the palace. The arrow chasing the bird in the sky, and piercing it. In the same moment the bird broke into pieces while making a clear sound, and blue small birds were vividly born from them. The color of about ten small birds as glossy as enamel was Prussian blue, they fluttered shinningly and landed here and there on the ground. They were gradually lightening their own color. The birds decolorized while fluttering, they became transparent fragments and broke into pieces in turn. The transparent fragments spiraling down like petals. When each of them touched the ground, it was broken with a faint sound. Making a clink-clink sound, the transparent fragments were scattered in the entire yard.

The next were two. — These were golden transparent ones like sunlight. Both of those big birds rose up to the sky height, after crossing each other around the yard. Two archers shot arrows. Each arrow pierced each bird, and the birds changed into a bevy of small golden birds. Small birds that were vividly sparkled with their wings danced down from the height, becoming transparent and breaking into fragments in turn. The golden color petals fluttered. Pale purple birds flew away among twinkling golden color petals. And then, three. When three birds were pierced and changed color into vivid purple-blue, next four light-pink birds ran and rose up to the height. The bevy of red small birds that was born in the height was breaking while dancing, and became falls of transparent pink petals.

The various color birds flew up. They were shot and changed the shape into small vivid birds, the bevies of them danced and flew down, and they were broken and became fragile petals. The sound of broken petals was twisted, and filled the entire yard with tones like sleet.

The last one was thirty silver birds. When being shot and broken, they changed their shape into bevies with pure white wings. The bevy of pure-white small birds danced glossily reflecting sunshine, landed down breaking and flapping, and changed into transparent petals of milky-white color. Innumerable, fragile petals falling down in white. As if whole pear flowers were scattering all at once.

Hisho watched the last piece made a sound like the subdued sigh when it broke.

The yard which extended in front of Shōten-den(承天殿) was completely quiet. After a little pause, he heard the sound of people's sigh spread over like ripples. Hisho had left quietly from the place before it would become the voice of admiration.

—ended all.

He left the high building where he watched the shooting-arrow ceremony and went away from the western garden where the ceremony was held. He felt strangely very satisfied. It was only a beautiful scenery but it was good for Hisho's feelings. He had wanted to make that, and accomplished it completely. Nothing else.

He alone passed through the Romon(路門) to under the clouds, and went straight to Rajin-fu(羅人府). "It was splendid." he said to Seikō(青江) who paled at worrying about the development of the shooting-arrow ceremony and fluttered about in the courtyard.

“Then — smoothly?”

With tearful look Seikō(青江) ran up to [Hisho](#).

Anyway, they hadn't had enough time. It was all they could secure the number of [Tōshaku](#) required, and they had no time to test [Tōshaku](#) to seem just like Taisha(大射). Though they did test shooting single [Tōshaku](#) again and again, the problem was if a rising up [Tōshaku](#) and fluttering down small birds which were just fragments would fly into each other. The fragments were simply modeled on the birds, so they fluttering down only from the shape, their flying tracks could not be operated. If the fragment hit the rising [Tōshaku](#), its orbit must have changed. The archer might miss shooting it.

“The height and position of the fragment stayed just as we intended. Thankfully, they did not miss shooting as much as one.”

“Good”, said Seikō(青江) and he squatted down as if losing his strength.

“...If they missed shooting or if [Tōshaku](#) dropped before being shot, those were my worries.”

“I felt uneasy at first, but, soon I understood this is safe. I saw it at ease. Beautiful, unbelievable. — I wanted to show it to you.”

“Yes”, Seikō(青江) nodded smiling through his tears.

It was a special view, so [Hisho](#) wanted to show it to him. He was only a Rajin(羅人), so he was not permitted to participate in the ceremony on the clouds even if he went as a supervisor.

“As you said, it was good we had made the white for the end.”

He looked at the outside of the courtyard. The winter sun was setting between the huge gorges. He was slightly able to see [Gyōten](#) for the direction where the sun, whose life is the shortest of year, went down. The pears that Shōran(蕭蘭) had planted shed their leaves, slept and waited for a new spring.

“Is it like...?”

[Hisho](#) could not hear Seikō(青江) because his voice was very low like a murmur, but he knew what Seikō(青江) said. The scenery of spring that Shōran(蕭蘭) had expected. The pure-white pear flower clouds cover the valley, and the petals flutter all together when the wind blows. Seikō(青江)’s eyes were turned to the bottom of the valley like seeing what existed in his memory.

“Yeah”, [Hisho](#) nodded.

It was night. [Sekichō-shi](#) jumped into the place where [Hisho](#) toasted to their success with Seikō(青江) and his craftsmen. [Suiryō](#) blushing in excitement said the Ruler wanted him.

Actually, [Hisho](#) did not want to hear anything. [Hisho](#) was satisfied with the scenery that he had made. Though he didn’t want the evaluation from another person, being dragged by [Suiryō](#) he headed back to above the clouds again because he had no right to refuse. He was handed to a higher official when they arrived at Romon(路門), and he went to the outer palace where the Ruler would wait. He felt depressed along the way. This was the second time he went to the outer palace. The last disappointment was recalled bitterly in his mind, even these days when it came to have no meaning.

The outer palace used for the imperial conference was a huge building, of its center there was the huge high platform where the throne was placed on, and a bamboo blind surrounded the platform. Being urged by the official he approached the presence, he knelt and bowed until his forehead touched the

floor. A voice inside the bamboo blind told him to raise his head, but it was probably not the Ruler's because it was male's. When he raised his head by the voice, the same voice told the official to leave and [Hisho](#) to stand up and come nearer.

He erected himself getting flustered. In the extensive palace, he seemed alone at this time. As the lamplight was only around the throne, [Hisho](#) could not see the edge of the building. In a too huge space his existence was so unreliable. Timidly advancing to the presence, he knelt and bowed as he was told.

“... Are you the Ra-shi(羅氏)?”

This time, he heard a young female voice. Though the voice of the speaker was ever so close, he could not see even her shape because of the bamboo blind.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“I heard you would take charge of the shooting-arrow ceremony directly. The unparalleled Ra-shi(羅氏).”

“Not knowing about the evaluation, I made the [Tōshaku](#) with Rajin(羅人).”

“Uh-huh”, the young Ruler muttered. Her voice paused as if finding a word.

“...I apologize to you. To tell the truth, though I called you all the way, I don't know how to express what I want to say. It was...”

Ruler said to [Hisho](#) holding his breath.

“...It was so beautiful as if painting my heart.”

His pulse raced. A very faint sigh reached his opened ears unconsciously.

“I saw the unforgettable ...I thank you.”

At this moment [Hisho](#) heard her honest voice, he suddenly understood his wish reached her. Ruler probably understood [Hisho](#)’s —Shōran(蕭蘭)’s and Seikō(青江)’s feelings which made the [Tōshaku](#) though it’s not that they tried to say something by [Tōshaku](#).

“I receive an almost undue amount of compliments, ma’am.”

He thought this was the best while bowing. He thought about his resignation at this time again. [Hisho](#) thought that he had done all that needed doing. It’s good that he would leave his all in the hands of Seikō(青江). —when thinking so, he heard another voice.

“I look forward to a next time.”

The New Ruler continued her word before he said he would not have a next time.

“...If possible, I would like to see it alone. Raising the gloomy bamboo blind. More small-scale, only us —alone.”

The Ruler’s word was genuine and frank. It was the yard at night that crossed [Hisho](#)’s mind as soon as he heard it. The moon or a bonfire? —In the garden brightly shone, there didn’t seem to be anybody. Archers keeping within the shadows, he standing there, only the Ruler watching alone, in the garden neither words nor cheers, and [Tōshaku](#) can break beautifully.

[Hisho](#) talks by [Tōshaku](#). Ruler listens to it. Talk to each other, he guessed that

was the meaning of the Ruler's word.

Birds are white, [Hisho](#) thought. They are clearly made out in the dark, they sparkle by the bonfire when broken. They dance down as if the sea of the night reflects moonlight. Then, the sound is like the sound of the waves. Faint quiet sound of the waves that invites people to sleep —.

[Hisho](#) saw a white bird in his mind as he knelt and bowed until his forehead touched the floor. The last bird in the sound of the surf. The last one going straight to Ruler avoiding the arrow of the archer. He believes this Ruler will not refuse because it is ominous.

“...At any time if you want, Your Majesty.”

[Hisho](#) responded.

—A new dynasty starts in [Kei](#).